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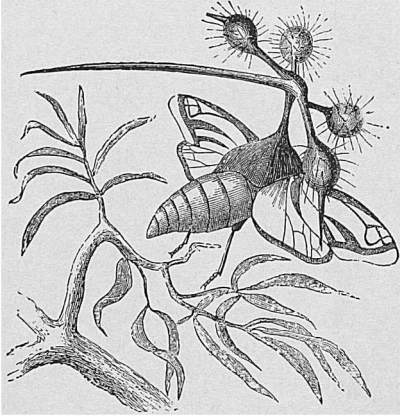
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A PHILOSOPHER AND A BUTTERFLY

BY C. H. A. BJERREGAARD

Illustrated by engravings of remarkable insects.



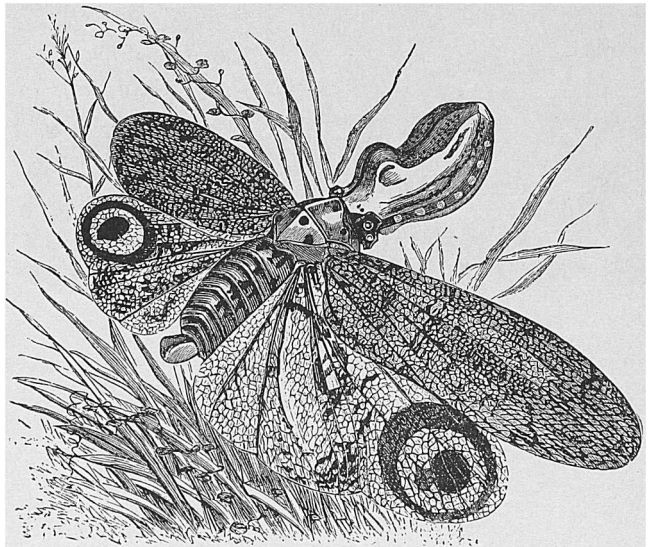
A BRAZILIAN ODDITY (BOCYDIUM)

It was a beautiful myth, created by Greek imagination, that Pan, the great god, Nature impersonated, wedded the nymph Echo. It symbolized that every note he blew from his pipe of reeds called forth a harmonious response in her tender bosom.

Nature, the great god, calls out and expects the artist to respond. Nature is, as the Vedanta has it, a dancer who "comes forth" upon the scene "to be adored with an adoration which is not for her sake but for that of the adorer." The adorer is the true artist.

A close observation of nature will show that all things delight to wear each other's robes. The chromatic scale of autumn's many-colored leaves is an harmonious counterpart of the musical. The insects blossom in the spring, like trees and plants; glossy and tinted, they imitate the feathered and winged plumages which we call birds, but to some extent they lose their peculiar brightness and lustre after the marriage season.

Small as many of them are, their minute world reflects the ideas of the macrocosm. Hence the ancient mythologists used them as symbols of truth. From time immemorial the butterfly has been the emblem of resurrection. There are two sides to resurrection, death and revival, hence Eros held a butterfly in his hand. The souls of the departed were represented in the forms of butterflies carried toward Elysium by a dolphin. Both the dolphin and the moon, in Hellenic belief, carried the souls of the dead, because these represented to them, respectively, the stormy sea and the wintry night. The butterfly was also often represented upon the seven strings of the lyre, and upon a burning torch. It dies to be born again. That the phases of the moon seem to correspond in the sky to the zoological



THE GREAT SOUTH AMERICAN LANTERN-FLY

transformations of the butterfly is an observation of no less an authority than Angelo de Gubernatis.

Why should artists mainly limit themselves to the larger animals, when they look for symbols? To be sure, insects are commonly cited to express ideas of smallness ; but certainly clouds of butterflies and "armies" of locusts could be



A SOUTH AMERICAN OWL-BUTTERFLY

used for mass-effects. How marvellously does Raphael distribute insects all through the decorations of his loggias? Nor is this strange. Glance at the exquisite curves and balance of forms and the strange array of patterns in the wings of these moths and butterflies. One can omit, as in these engravings, all the magnificence of color, scintillating with metallic sheen, which render some of these tropical forms so vividly gorgeous in the dark forest-depths, and still perceive their great beauty and value in decoration : "The Lord hath made the little and the great, and hath equally care of all."

A Swedenborgian writer, following closely his master, has written : "We have seen in birds, with their quick sight, pleasant voices or brilliant plumage, and their human sympathy, images of our 'affections for thinking,' and of the spiritual or moral principles relating to that life. The winged insects, likewise, love to fly in the air, yet

not in long flights, but from one near object to another, as their changing fancy happens to be attracted. They are forms of thinking, but of mere sensual impressions and pleasures."

Let us suppose this true. In the Word, "flying things" do represent intellectual truths. Studying the first paragraph with the help of the Swedish seer, we are brought closer to the meaning of the ancient symbol for the soul ; the butterfly is Form not Contents. And art is Form—form in the sense of Plato's ideas or

archetypes. Plato demanded that art should give birth to these "causes of the astral world" and understood the butterfly symbol correctly.

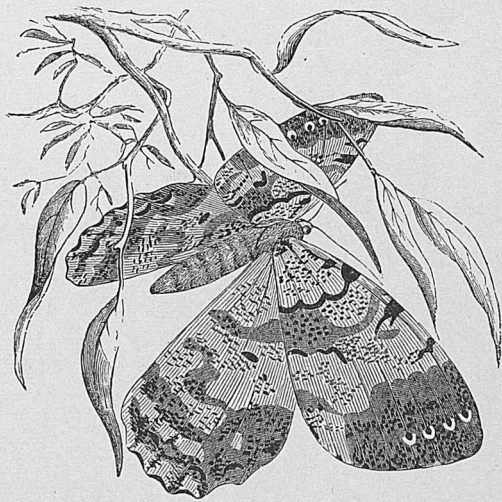
The Fathers of the Church had a wrong idea when they symbolized resurrection by a lovely female child with butterfly's wings. The natural history of the butterfly does not teach us that a decayed body is recomposed in its elements and reunited after a certain interval to the soul. The caterpillar does not become a butterfly by a supernatural transformation, but simply by the casting away of outward coverings. Thus the true artist—the Echo who weds Pan—comes to the realization of his sublime call only through the butterfly process. The butterfly is the artist's true symbol.

How similar he is to the insect! What an unparalleled voracity, and what a quickness with which he digests impressions! How laboriously he proceeds to maturity, and how short-lived, usually, after his last transformation!

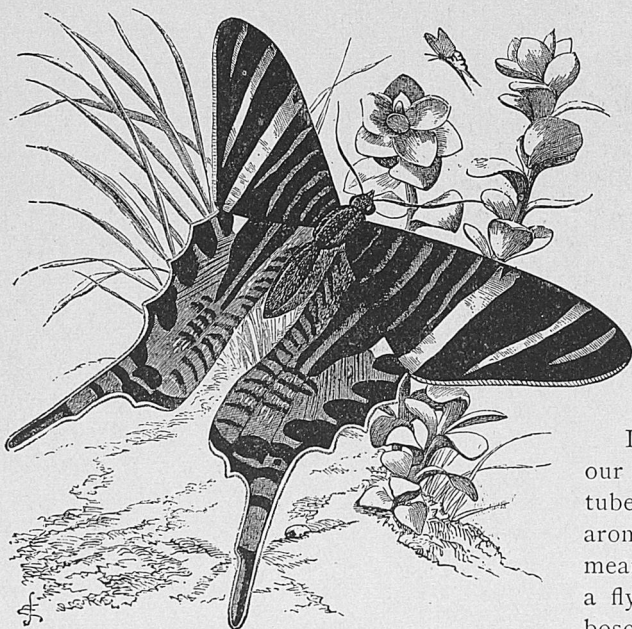
Insects exist the most part of their lives in the grub state, then a considerable time in the chrysalis; their winged state, being merely that of completed maturity, is also the briefest. The dynamic power of mind over body, which we expect *par*

excellence to see exemplified in the artist, is represented on the butterfly's wings in the minute feather-like scales, overlapping each other, reflecting various colors, and arranged in a mosaic of inimitable beauty. The architecture of the wings represents Order or Form in the most exalted way, and the omniscient eye "holds the rounds of creation in thrall."

If we look at a gnat piercing our hand with its blood-sucking tube, or at a butterfly pumping aroma and nectar from a rose by means of its spiral tongue, or at a fly sucking sugar with its proboscis, we shall hardly believe that these are their jaws and



AN INDIAN MOTH (ELPHOS HYMENARIA)



URANIA SLOANUS: WEST INDIES



DEILEPHILA DAUCUS

garnished insect at the head of this article serves a definite purpose. An example which naturalists love to expatiate upon is shown in the very last picture, where an insect, for its protection, has acquired so perfect a likeness to some object not attractive to its enemies, that it rests safe in this mimicry as under a garment of invisibility, such as ancient wizards used to bestow. Not only the casual eye of heedless man would surely overlook this insect, mistaking it for a leaf, but even the sharper vision of birds, monkeys, and predatory insects, such as the butterflies wish to avoid, will mostly pass it by.

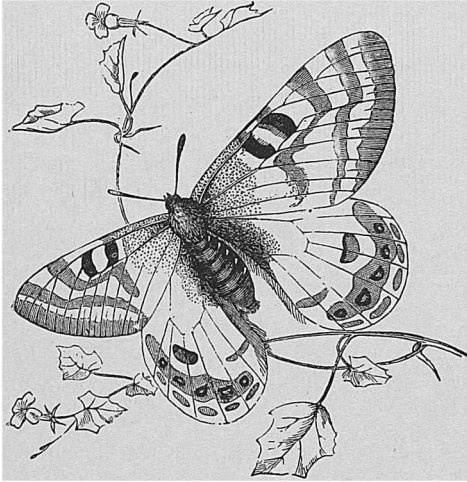
A Darwinian naturalist will see "adaptations" in these divergent forms; an Hegelian philosopher will speak of "List der Vernunft;" and I suppose Schopenhauer would make these curiously mouthed butterflies speak of the world as their "representation." A Swedenborgian would discover

lips. Yet modern science has established the fact that these dissimilarities are but modifications of the same model, adapted to different functions; and it will point out to you the homology of parts, deceivingly distant in shape and appearance, and wholly diverse in function; and it will explain how each change has come about through an attempt to conform to altered conditions, and to find the highest usefulness in overcoming obstacles. As beauty has its practical use, so even such an extraordinary deformity as that of the amazingly



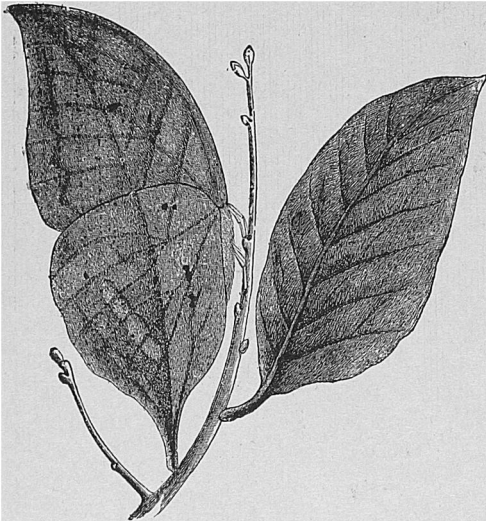
1. A TAILED EAST INDIAN BUTTERFLY (TROPICÆ LETO). 2. A SOUTH AFRICAN MOTH (GINANISA ISIS)

“correspondences,” and who knows but that modern theosophists would discover the laws of karma and reincarnation in these curious forms. However, they



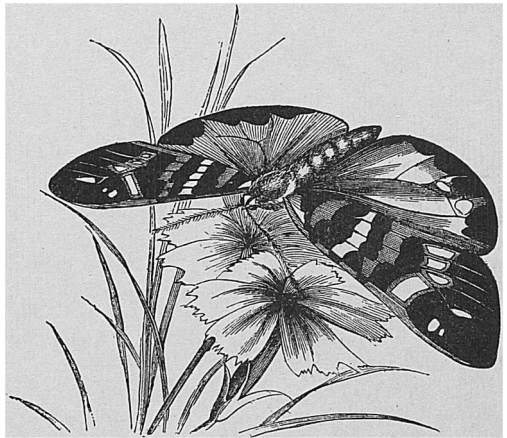
AN APOLLO BUTTERFLY (PARNASSIUS)

As the bee collects nectar and departs without injuring the flower, its color or scent, so let the wise man read these lines. To the eyes of the “initiate” the foliage of the grove displays in every leaf a volume of the Creator’s works. The fresh breath of the infinitely small is as worthy of



MIMICRY IN A BUTTERFLY (KALLIMA PARALEKTA)

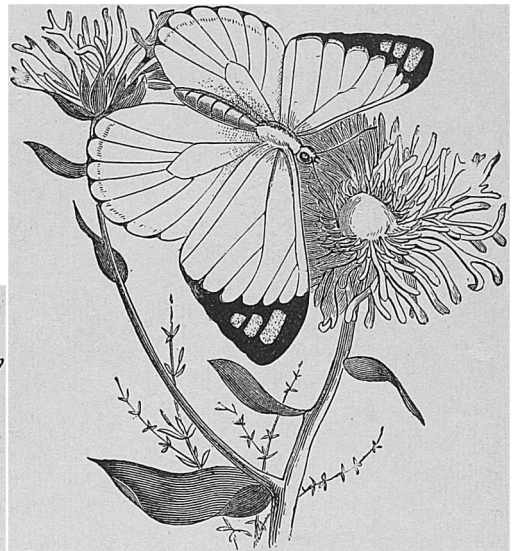
The left-hand figure is the insect ; the right-hand one a leaf.



ERASMIA PULCHELLA : INDIA

would all get a glimpse of That which is behind the veil.

“God hath made all atoms in space mirrors, and fronteth each one with His perfect face.”



TERACOLAS IONE : NATAL

study and full of signification as the infinitely large. If man be a microcosm, we must be able to discover the scale of types or symbols on descending lines as well as on the ascending. The eagle in his soaring flight is no better type of the artists’ mind, than the butterfly whose “flight is but from one near object to another.”